POWER BLOX

In the distant future, Earth is under attack!

The Player Characters are rookie mech pilots, recruited into the Earth military from all walks of life and dragged through intensive training to meld with their robotic fighting machines before being flung into mortal combat with the unknowable alien armada.

Characters are described by four **skills** in terms of mechanics. The first two apply to missions, the other two are used while at the base.

Shooting – It is used for shooting at enemy mechs.

Piloting – Describes how well a pilot can steer a mech and perform evasive manoeuvres.

Personality – Represents the strength of the pilot‘s personality, eloquence and charisma.

Soldiering – Measures how good the pilot is when it comes to military matters. This covers is not only shooting, fighting or avoiding capture, but also military administration, writing reports, being savvy in an army environment, commanding soldiers at the base, knowledge of protocol, tactics etc.

Players distribute the values 3, 2, 2, 1 between these skills however they choose. The skills can later be improved by downing alien mecha in combat.

One of the pilots will be a commander of the patrol, with the rank of Mech Sergeant. Decide who it will be by making Soldiering rolls (see the Resolution section below). The player with the highest roll takes command and gets one more skill point to invest in their starting skills. Other pilots start the game with the rank of Trooper.

The Mech

Mechs are giant robot suits loaded with humanity's most advanced weaponry and technology, supported by powerful learning algorithms capable of incorporating recovered alien technology into their exoskeletons. A mech can fly in the vacuum of space, walk on the land, and travel in the air and sea.
Each player must build a model of their mech from Lego (other building block type educational toys are available). Most mechs a humanoid robots, but perhaps yours looks more like a starship or a robotic animal. When you first design your mech, you can build it any way you want. But make sure you have plenty of building blocks left over for the GM to use.

The Farewell Letter

After the first mission, players start writing their farewell letters for their beloved – a girlfriend or boyfriend, spouse, parents, children, friends.... After each mission the pilot survives, the player will add a new paragraph or a couple of sentences. When the pilot dies, the player gets a moment to add a sentence or two to finish up their letter, and finally sign it. As soon as other pilots return to the base, the player reads their pilot’s farewell letter, written just before the mission from which they never returned.

Resolution

Actions (whether in combat or back at base) are resolved by rolling three six-sided dice. Add up all the dice together and add the skill value. Then compare the result with a **target number**. In some cases the number is provided by these rules, in others it will be decided by the GM according to the player’s action or intent. Even the numbers listed in these rules can change under various circumstances.

The Debt

If the pilot fails a roll, he can tap his reserves and exhaust himself. This allows him to re-roll the dice (keep the second roll), but also incurs a debt on the skill. The player gets a −1 penalty for each **debt** whenever using this skill. The debt applies immediately after the roll that incurred it. You can only take one debt per roll but the number of debts per mission is not limited. However, each subsequent debt only spins the vicious circle further – the more debts a pilot has, the more debts he needs to take to avoid failing. A debt stays with the pilot until it is removed by succeeding in a conflict while at the Base; see the Base section below.

If a pilot keeps pushing their limits, their reaction time worsens and focus dwindles. They fight absent-mindedly and become easier prey for the aliens. They cannot sleep at night: they keep getting woken by nightmares. They show up for morning muster with bags under their eyes, jittery and tired. Not even higher doses of FullaBeanZ help any more, and the moment their luck runs out is getting ever closer.

The Photo

Each player should bring a picture of a girl or boy that their character keeps pinned up in the cockpit or in their wallet. It does not necessarily need to be a loved one; it can also be a photo of a celebrity that they idolise. It may seem odd that space warriors of the far future would bring physical photographs with them into battle, but during the war in which POWER BLOX is set, there just happened to be a fad for retro 20th century imaging technology.

Players can use the photo once per mission. Looking at the photo gives the pilot a boost, reminds them of the reason for risking life and limb in glorified tennis exoskeleton, and also allows them to use 4 dice for the next roll instead of the usual 3. The photo can be used this way only once. It has no effect in terms of game mechanics after it has been used once. You need to win in a personal conflict related to the relationship to replenish its use – by overcoming a relationship crisis, by directly saving the person in the photo during a raid, by competing with another suitor etc. Alternatively, you can just get a new picture of a different person or cut it out from a magazine.

The Mission

When pilots get into combat, resolve it using the following system. Combat happens in rounds – one round beings a period of time long just enough for each pilot to attempt one action.

Actions

Pilots can choose from several actions during the fight. Their meaning and resolution are explained below.

There is no point trying to track the exact positions of each unit engaged in the battle, since these would change in a second anyway. A mech fight is a mad whirl of split-second reactions, plasma blasts, shooting all around, avoiding and escaping each other. It is impossible to keep track of the general situation and the position of every single mech under these circumstances. To keep things simple pilots can perform actions against any enemy unit.

Actions are announced and performed for each side in turn. The attacking side goes first. (If this is an engagement where you cannot determine the attacker, let the commander of each side roll 3 dice. The one with the highest total takes the first turn.)

There is no strict order for the pilots on one side to act. Let the players themselves decide, ideally while taking into account the chain of command.

Once all pilots from both sides have performed their actions, the turn ends and another one begins.

You can perform the following actions in a combat turn:

Shooting

The pilot can aim at a target and shoot at it from weapons installed on his mech. You can shoot from any position but the chance to hit without is relatively low. It is better to target the opponent first to obtain a better shooting position - see below.

The pilot rolls Shooting skill to hit another mech and needs to roll higher than a **target number of 16**. You must strike off one point of Ammunition whether you succeed or fail. See below for more details.

If a pilot rolls three 1s during a shooting roll, their weapons have jammed and are useless from now on. It is impossible to fire them until they are repaired upon return to the base.

Targeting an Enemy

A pilot can attempt to outmanouevre an enemy and get it into their cross-hairs to improve their chances to hit. The pilot rolls the Piloting skill against the opponent's Piloting to determine whether the targeting attempt has succeeded.

If successful, the pilot locks onto the enemy and gets +5 bonus to Shooting in any following turn.

If unsuccessful, it means the enemy has manoeuvred well enough to stay clear of an easy shot.

Chasing an Enemy Off

If a pilot is being tailed, they might decide to shake the enemy off by some clever manoeuvring. Roll the pilot's Piloting against the attacker's Piloting. Success means the attacker has been shaken off (and therefore cannot use the +5 bonus for subsequent shooting). Failure means the attacker managed to stay locked on and can use the Shooting bonus.

Wingman

A pilot may decide to stay with a friendly mech, providing covering fire and generally helping out. They provide cover for the other mech so that enemies attempting to target the leading mech have to manoeuvre against two pilots instead of just one. If a pilot has a wingman (another pilot who performed the Wingman action) and starts targeting an enemy, they get a +3 bonus for Shooting. If, on the contrary, a pilot starts tailing a mech that has a wingman of its own, their Shooting is decreased by 3 (so the targeting bonus becomes just +2 instead of +5).

An interceptor or a fighter can have one wingman, a bomber (or a transport) can be followed by two mecha performing the Wingman action. Wingmen cannot provide a Shooting bonus to a bomber, they simply

decrease the Shooting bonus of any targeting attackers (the effects stack, meaning two wingmen would reduce the bonus by 6, i.e. to −1). This way two interceptors can safely escort a damaged bomber back home.

Flanking

The flanking move represents manoeuvring away from battlefield to swoop in from an unexpected angle The player gets a a flanking token which they can later use with any action for each turn of flanking. Using a token adds a +2 bonus to the action and the token is returned to the pool. You can use as many tokens as you want per turn (and use the sum of their bonuses).

If a pilot is serving as a wingman of a mech that is flanking, they also get a flanking token (as if they performed this action themselves). Likewise, if a pilot is locked on and targeting an opponent who is flanking, they also get a flanking token because they are shadowing the mech closely.

Escaping Combat

When a mech is damaged, out of ammo or about to lose the battle, the pilot will in all likelihood attempt to save their neck and an expensive machine instead of losing both in a futile fight.

The pilot gets an escape token for each turn spent escaping. The token is awarded automatically, however the pilot cannot perform any other action. Once they accumulate three tokens, they have gained a sufficient lead and enemies can no longer threaten them. The mech leaves the battle.

Pursuit

A pilot can also spend an action to pursue a fleeing enemy (a mech with one or more escape tokens). Roll their Piloting skill against the escapee's Piloting. If successful, they manage to get closer to the fleeing mech – discard one of its escape tokens (return it to the pool).

The Paxton Gambit

If the pilot succeeds in a Piloting roll against a **target number of 16**, they perform the Paxton Gambit and shake off any enemies locked onto them with the Targeting move. In addition, by doing this they also turn to face the enemy and can fire one fly-by burst against them (basic fire, no bonuses).

All Guns Blazing

A pilot who has accumulated three flanking tokens can perform a quick attack pass while blasting all weapons. They strike off 2 points of ammo (see Ammunition below) but gain a +6 bonus to their Shooting skill. Return the flanking tokens to the pool. You can use the bonus against a single opponent (+6 bonus) or against two separate opponents (dividing the bonus to +3 and +3).

Absorb Tech

Whenever a combat unit is damaged or destroyed (see Damage, below), remove one brick, weapon or other component from its model and place it on the battleground. In any subsequent turn, another unit may use the Absorb Tech move to collect that brick. When (if) they get back to base, they may add this component to their own model.

Positioning Models as Visual Representation

If a pilot has locked onto an enemy with targeting, signify this by moving his Lego mech model behind the enemy's. To represent the Wingman action, again simply place one mech next to the other. If somebody is trying to flee the battlefield, move their mech aside from the others and put an escape token next to it.

The Mechs

Interceptors

Because mech designs are highly individualistic, picking up unique characteristics during pilot training thanks to the use of adaptive technology, they are generally classified by the kind of combat computer loaded into the central core. The bulk of the Earth interceptor force consists of **Hawk class** suits and the less numerous but more powerful **Black Mamba Mk I**. The vast majority of alien fighter units are of a standard classified as **901Epsilon**.

Mech Damage

When a mech is hit in combat (i.e. when the opponent succeeds in a Shooting roll against it), it gets damaged. The pilot of a damaged mech suffers a −5 penalty to both Piloting and Shooting. Once the battle is over, the pilot must succeed in a Piloting roll against 8 (subtract the penalty) or they will crash before making it back to the starbase. In that case they needs to roll a six sided die to see if they survive – a roll of 1 or 2 means the pilot dies.

When a mech is hit for the second time, it is immediately destroyed. The pilot must roll a six sided die to see if they survive – rolling 4, 5 or 6 means they manage to eject alive with an escape pod. Any other roll means they have been directly killed by weapons fire, have been wounded and are unable to eject, have burned alive stuck in the cockpit or that their escape pod did not function.

If this happens in interstellar space, above inhospitable tundra, a desert or other extreme environment (the GM must tell the players of this circumstance before the mission begins), the pilot survives only on a roll of 5 or 6.

Brought Down In Enemy Territory

Even when a pilot's mech is destroyed in enemy territory, they survive on a roll of 4, 5 or 6 as usual. Then, however, they are behind enemy lines and have two options. Either they surrender themselves and the fight is over for them. They spend the rest of the war in whatever no-doubt-hellish conditions the aliens have waiting for them and the player needs to create a new character, the same as if the pilot had died.

Or, the pilot can attempt to escape from occupied territory and rejoin Earth forces (by contacting the local resistance groups, sneaking into a spaceport and stealing a vessel, making away with a fighter from an alien capital ship, or perhaps fashioning a makeshift lifeboat from equipment they salvage in an abandoned asteroid mine). The player needs to come up with a plan of escape, describe it and finally play out 2 conflicts with the GM (during the Base phase) which represent the key moments of this plan. These conflicts typically use the Soldiering skill. Unless the pilot succeeds in both of them, they get captured (or shot while on the run). If they do succeed, they manage to return home and can return once more unto the breach. Moreover, they receive a promotion for escaping enemy territory.

Attacking FixedTargets

Interceptors may also be sent to destroy specific ground or space targets (communication stations, fuel depots, warp points, mechs on the ground or aboard ships, surfaced subspace probes, long-range missile launch devices, etc.).

A different set of actions is used for attacking ground targets than for mech combat. The attack itself takes two turns – in the first turn the mech approaches the target and in the second it hits it and peels away to safety. The pilot can choose from two actions for the approach: Direct Approach or Evasive Approach.

Direct Approach means that mech goes straight towards the target and takes little or no evasive action to avoid defensive fire. It has a better chance to hit the target, because the pilot focuses on it and goes right for it (in the second turn the pilot gets a bonus of +5 to hit the target), but it also puts itself in danger of being hit (other units have a bonus +2 to hit in both turns of attack). If the pilot chooses Evasive Approach, their mech makes evasive manoeuvres, turns and often changes course to evade defensive measures. There are no bonuses or penalties.

After the approach comes the attack itself. The player rolls the pilot's Shooting skill against a **target number of 16**. The pilot can attack the target with standard plasma, laser or warp cannon (sufficient to destroy inert mechs, space transports, or enemy soldiers, but not significantly armoured targets), or with a special bomb mounted on its exoskeleton (the bomb gives −3 to Piloting while present).

The target can be protected by defensive weapons. When in range these can shoot at the incoming mech every turn, same as when the pod-gunners of bombers defend their craft (see below).

Ammunition

Each mech carries only a limited supply of ammunition on board, measured in points (e.g. a Black Mamba can carry 10 points of ammo). Each shot decreases ammunition by one point, and the “All Guns Blazing” action decreases it by two.

If the mech carries any special ammunition, bombs or missiles, these are tracked in points as well, and the player needs to subtract these after each shot as usual. If the mech drops all of its bombs in one go, the player marks all of them off.

Mechs

Hawk Mk I (Earth)

The most widespread interceptor in the war is an older, though reliable, battle mech. By the end of the war, it has gradually been losing pace with its opponents, and first-line units were switching to Black Mambas instead.

Special rules:

The mech has 16 points of ammunition; it carries more ammo than a Black Mamba.

It gets +1 to basic Shooting (i.e. when not targeting an opponent); the effect of its extensive weapon array.

Black Mamba (Earth)

The best Earth mech in the war boasts good manoeuvrability, range and response time . All interceptor units gradually switched to this mech.

Special rules:

The mech has 10 points of ammunition; being lighter, it carries less ammo.

It gets +1 bonus to Piloting when trying to target an enemy or shake it off; this is thanks to the aforementioned manoeuvrability.

901Epsilon (Alien)

The most common interceptor used by the aliens.

Special rules:

The mech has 8 points of warp-blaster ammunition.

As well as warp-blaster, 901Epsilon mechs also have three meson cannon, one mounted in the centre of the head and two on the arms. These cause 2 damage instead of the usual 1, meaning they destroy an interceptor in a single hit. The mech carries 3 points of cannon ammunition and can use them only when targeting an opponent. (It can fire the warp-blasters at any time.)

011Cadmus (Alien)

This heavy fighter initially served as a bomber escort while also carrying bombs, but proved to be vulnerable to Earth interceptions. It served as a fast bomber that needed escorts of its own later on.

Special rules:

The mech carries 8 points of warp-blaster ammunition.

It has two meson cannons (see 901Epsilon) with 4 points of ammunition.

It has a hind-mounted warp-blaster that can shoot (no bonuses) at anyone who targets an action against the mech.

It gets a −4 penalty to Piloting when performing actions, being heavy and difficult to handle.

Bombers

Pilots may also encounter bombers, heavily armed and armoured spacecraft that hurtle from alien warp portals to rain death on human settlements across the solar system.

Special Rules

The massive bomber craft differ from mechs in their considerably worse manoeuvrability – they get a basic −3 penalty to Piloting which further increases by −4 if the plane is loaded with bombs. This additional penalty is lost after dropping the bombs (one action).

They are also armed with several machine guns, providing coverage of most angles around the craft. Each bomber can fire two bursts of warp-blaster fire per round (which consists of the human turn and the alien turn). If an enemy pilot performs an action which targets a bomber (shooting, targeting, going all guns blazing), it is assumed that they had to approach it closely. The GM may decide that the gunners will shoot at the incoming mech, using one of their two bursts (this is a basic Shooting roll with no bonuses). The shooting occurs simultaneously with the interceptor's action. If the bomber still has any bursts left when it is its turn to take an action, it may use these to shoot at any mech that is targeting it (it is possible to shoot at a single mech for a second time). Otherwise, these burst are "lost" (unused). To hit a passing interceptor is difficult, and most pod-gunners will instead try to create a curtain of fire to discourage the enemy from attacking.

If the gunners are shooting at a mech that is targeting their bomber, their work is much easier. The mech is close and has only a limited ability to manoeuvre because it needs to keep the bomber in its cross-hairs. The pod-gunners get a +2 bonus to Shooting.

Bomber pilots use the same values of the Piloting skill as interceptor pilots (2–6). Bomber gunners have a Shooting skill of 1 or 2 only.

Damage to Bombers

Bombers are sturdier than interceptors and therefore must be hit twice to get damaged, and another two hits to be destroyed (4 hits in total). The actual effects of damage or being destroyed remain unchanged, and mechs may use the "Absorb Tech" on them as usual.

Ammunition

There is no need to keep track of the warp-blaster ammunition aboard bombers because they can carry large supplies. It is assumed that a bomber will not run out of ammunition in a typical fight (exceptional situations may be house-ruled by the GM individually).

Bombers also carry a specific amount of bombs which they can drop to increase their manoeuvrability.

Bomber Craft

111Echo (Alien)

A heavy, slower bomber with big carrying capacity, endurance, and weaponry.

> *Special rules:*
>
> The craft can suffer 3 points of damage instead of the usual 2; it is a very hardy craft.
>
> If the enemy rolls three sixes on a Shooting roll against this vessel, the bomber is immediately destroyed. The 111Echo has a large, multi-spectrum sensor array which, useful as it may be for piloting and aiming, is vulnerable to attacking fire.

880Jocasta (Alien)

A fast bomber that almost rivals the speed of a Hawk-class mech when not carrying bombs. It is, however, inadequately armed.

> *Special rules:*
>
> When attempting to escape combat, the plane does not receive the usual bomber −3 penalty to Piloting; this is due to its speed.

Harris XL5 (Earth)

This was already been an outdated spacecraft by the time of the initial alien invasion, and as such is mainly used for surprise raids where defences will be minimal.

> *It has no special rules.*

The Enemy

The opponents of the Earth forces are the pilots of the alien armada. These can be divided into three categories, based on their skills:

Rookies

These pilots have barely finished their basic training, and still have not proven themselves in combat.

Piloting: 2

Shooting: 1

Veterans

Veterans have participated in at least one campaign, have returned from many flights and they might even have scored a couple of kills. They are cool-headed, dangerous opponents.

Piloting: 3

Shooting: 2

Aces

Veterans of dozens of planetary subjugations, these pilots know all the tricks in the book.

Piloting: 6

Shooting: 5

The Mission

The missions the pilots are sent to are chosen by the GM. Once a mission has been finished and all scenes of the Base phase have been played (see below), the GM chooses a new mission. In a special case when the danger has not passed yet or when the aliens start a large-scale offensive, the GM may opt for having the pilots start two missions in row (thus skipping the Base phase). This puts enormous stress on the pilots and the GM should not do this too often.

Some of the common types of missions are:

The Sweep

Clearing local space of enemy forces.

The sweep is perhaps the most common mission. The goal is to prevent the enemy from bombing human settlements within the solar system or the Earth's military bases. The pilots will face bomber craft accompanied by interceptor escorts, which will try to distract their opponents from the bombers by entering the combat.

The fights happen over the planets and moons of our solar system. The alien units might already be approaching their target and the pilots have only a limited time to stop them. Set the number of turns after which the bombers will drop their load.

If sensors detect the bombers as soon as they exit their warp points, the pilots may have about 15 turns to shoot them down. If the bombers have been detected already close to home, the number of turns drops to 10. And if they have managed to arrive over the planetary or lunar surface, time runs out in 5 turns (making the interception very difficult). Bombers may also be attacking the pilots' home base directly, with the pilots scrambling their mechs under fire. Only one mech per turn can launch under such circumstances, and if the bombers manage to get into range of the starbase, other mechs will have to launch amidst dropping bombs and explosions.

The Pluto stop

A space operation with the task of stopping enemy craft beyond the fringes of the solar system. The combat happens in deep space (where pilots of destroyed mechs need to be rescued by long-range lifeboats, dropping their chances for saving their life to a roll of 5 or 6 only) or, if they have not been stopped in time, over the outer planets.

The Rodeo

A sweep into enemy territory. If a pilot's mech is shot down, read the section “Brought Down In Enemy Territory” above.

The Circus

A bombing run accompanied by a large interceptor escort, with the goal to lure enemy interceptors into combat, and to destroy major alien targets. The pilots' aim is to draw enemy interceptors away and keep them occupied in the area.

Here, above the outer planets of the alien dominion, the shoe is on the other foot. Earth pilots need to defend their bombers against alien interceptors who are trying to shoot them down.

The Ranger

Free excursions into enemy territory, performed either by a pair of interceptors or a whole flight, with the goal of keeping the enemy occupied and tiring out enemy interceptors.

The Base

The pilots lead their lives between missions on starbases or go on planetside leave.

Many pilots have their families or romantic interests near the base, visit pubs or dance halls where they may encounter misunderstandings from the locals, or perhaps go to a hospital to see a wounded friend. Each scramble could be their last one, friends keep dying left and right, and the nerves are tense. And so the pilots try to at least enjoy their life a bit before the Reaper grabs it and they burn alive in the cockpit or get vaporised.

Each pilot is entitled to have one personal scene between missions that explores his life outside the exoskeleton. The specific scene is the player's own choice – they get to say what the scene is about, in consultation with the GM. Other pilots may (and often should) participate in the scene, develop the story and steer the scene towards a conflict. Each personal scene should contain a conflict which is then resolved by a roll.

Success in the conflict means the pilot can cancel one of their Debt points (they choose which one). The target number to roll depends on the difficulty or riskiness of what the pilot is attempting to do. It is set by the GM after consulting the players. Easy conflicts (or conflict with low stakes) should use a target number of about 8–10, average ones 10–12, and severe conflicts 12–16 (in such case, the players may agree to cancel up to two points of Debt). Success and failure of the roll has more than a mechanical effect (deleting a point of Debt) though – it should also influence the narrative. Agree on the stakes beforehand and then play it out.

In other words, successes in life on the ground help the pilots to rest, relax their nerves a bit and fortify their resolve. The players get to develop personal stories of their characters and experience their life between missions. As mentioned, the choice of personal scenes depends to a large extent on the player, and probably arises from the pilot's personality.

Here are some examples of personal scenes to inspire you:

The Pub crawl

Conflicts: a brawl with space marines, a chase with military police that ends up in stealing jetbikes and making off for the base, an alien bomber raid and the subsequent flight to a bunker through the burning streets.

The Dance

Conflicts: getting a girl's affections, exchanging blows with another pilot, the sound of sirens that necessitates an immediate return to the base, hiding a girl or boy you've snuck onto the starbase.

Visiting parents, a brother, a girlfriend, a lover...

Conflicts: the pilot finds just a ruined house and needs to find the family, a fight arises during dinner – will they make up?, getting caught by the lover's husband, helping to rescue victims after an alien raid and fighting fires in the middle of a night.

The Police

Conflicts: the police come to arrest one of the pilots for murder – his girlfriend has been found dead and the police thinks it is his doing, the police seeks cooperation in the case of valuable energon vanishing from the base, one of the pilots has crashed because of a suspected engine sabotage – but who is responsible?

Military matters

Conflicts: an epic battle with bureaucracy to ensure enough spare parts for the squadron, trying to dismiss irrational orders that would only cost someone's life, a court martial for disobedience or because of a superior's hatred towards the pilot.

Behind Enemy Lines

Conflicts: the pilot tries to return to base.

The Campaign

A "campaign" is a long series of military engagements in which the pilots take part, in this case the war between Earth and the alien armada. Over the course of the campaign, pilots get promoted, or die and get replaced by new ones. The following pages describe how long-term play works.

The game consists of alternating Mission and Base phases. Usually they follow each other (one Mission, one Base, one Mission etc.), though it is possible that the pilots may be required to attend to a couple of missions in row without having the luxury to rest (thus skipping the Base phase).

Playing the Campaign

The game begins in the Base phase during which the green pilots, freshly assigned to the squadron as replacements, try to navigate Io city during an alien attack. The purpose of the scene is to illustrate the necessity to fight and stop the alien bombers.

The red trans-tube that is taking the pilots through the city stops, sirens ring from all sides, and people, disturbed from their everyday lives, hurry into bunkers in confusion.

In a couple of moments, all hell breaks loose, buildings collapse under explosions and streets burn in flames. After the sound of alien vortex engines fades away and the sirens stop, the only sounds are the screams of the wounded and cries of those who have lost their loved ones. What will the pilots do? Will they try to get into cover? Will they try to save the girl who stopped in the middle of the street, crying? Will they help to find survivors in the rubble that might contain unexploded bombs? Will they help fire fighters to quench the fires? Will they carry wounded and dead alongside emergency workers? Although the pilots cannot cancel a point of Debt for now (this being just a story scene), they can get harmed or even die due to a failed roll. On the other hand, success may mean they manage to save someone's life. This is an opportunity to create some contacts which will be of use later, or perhaps safe a wounded girl whom they will later visit in a hospital.

Afterwards, the Mission and Base phases alternate normally.

The pilots join a squadron equipped, just like most interceptor units during the war against the aliens, with Hawk-class mechs. The squadron may be rearmed with the newer Black Mambas after a few missions. This happens depending on the player's successes – better squadrons have priority for newer equipment.

The commanding pilot may roll his Soldiering skill against the target number of 12 after the fifth mission. This represents doing the paperwork and obtaining priority for his squadron. He gets a +1 bonus for each 5 enemies that the squadron has shot down. If successful, the squadron receives Black Mambas in time for the next mission. If not, other squadrons get priority and the player may roll again after the next mission. Subtract 1 from the target number for each mission after the first one (so it is 11 after the second, 10 after the third etc.)

Skill Improvement

If they are successful in missions, the player pilots get to improve their skills and acquire higher ranks. The Earth mech forces use the following rank hierarchy:

> Trooper → Mech Sergeant→ Warrant Officer (W/O) → Pilot Officer (P/O) → Mech Officer (F/O) → Squadron Leader (S/L) → Captain (Capt.) →Wing Commander (W/C)

As mentioned earlier, all pilots start with the rank of Trooper, with the exception of the commander who enters play with the rank of a Mech Sergeant.

For each four enemy tech blocks added to their mech, a pilot receives a promotion after they return to base. This also allows them to add one point to any one of their skills. If you are creating a new pilot of a higher rank, divide 8 basic point between the skills (these are equal to what a Trooper gets: 3, 2, 2, and 1), and then add 1 additional point for each rank above the first one (for example, a Captain get 8 basic points and then 4 bonus points).

From the rank of Captain onwards, a pilot can ask to be accompanied by another mech during missions. The mech will follow them and be their wingman (it will only play the "wingman" action during combat).

After 5 victories (that is, 5 enemies singlehandedly destroyed), the pilot attains the status of an ace and receives a Purple Dart with Coal-Sack Nebula Cluster, one of the Earth military's top twenty decorations. At 10 alien kills, they receive a bar to the PDCSNC. Squadron Leaders, Captains or Wing Commanders can also receive the Forward to Victory Starburst (FVS) after scoring 20 kills.

Pilot Death

The gradual death spiral of exhaustion and the lack of sleep (where the pilots fly in Debt and extend themselves too much), combined with the terrific danger of the missions means that only few pilots will survive till the end of the war. Pilots, even those controlled by the player, die. Such is the war. Such is life.

The game does not end with the death of a pilot, though. The dead are shortly replaced by newcomers who take their place in the squadron. The player creates a new pilot character and continues the game. The new pilot will be less experienced than the old one – their rank will be one lower (and they will receive the corresponding number of skill points). If the dead pilot was a Trooper, the replacement will also have the rank of Trooper.